



FAMILY UPDATE

32ND INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

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Settling in

With all of the 32nd Brigade's units settled into their new surroundings and missions for just over a month now, it's time for another family update — our second one from Iraq.

As we told you in our first update from Iraq, the 32nd's headquarters is in the International Zone (IZ) in Baghdad, so our ability to provide much detail on brigade elements located in other parts of Iraq will be somewhat limited until we've had a chance to visit them. Those opportunities have been rare so far, but we have been up to Taji and over to two forward operating bases (FOBs) on Victory Base Complex (called VBC, for short) where more than half of our 32nd Brigade units are operating.

We were happy to see two familiar faces from Wisconsin this past week when Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson and Command Sgt. Maj. George Stopper paid a visit to some of our locations. I know the Deputy Adjutant General and State Command Sergeant Major would have liked to have seen all of our troops at all of our locations — and would have, if they could — but that simply isn't possible during command visits which are limited to only a few days. But they did make it to VBC, the IZ and had a visit scheduled to Camp Bucca (a flight to Taji was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions), so they were able to get to the duty stations of well over half of the 32nd Brigade's units.

Here's a brief summary of what's been going on:

Iraq

It's hot here. Really hot. Last week we had temps in central Iraq of 116 degrees. While it's been a tad cooler for the past few days (down to highs of 107), winds out in the desert somewhere kicked up so much dust that visibility in and around Baghdad was reduced to a few feet — really! Dust can hang in the air for days, and when it finally settles out there is fine, light brown dust everywhere. And I mean everywhere.

All over Iraq, 32nd Brigade troops have begun wearing combat patches—if they hadn't already been wearing them from previous combat zone deployments. In most cases, this combat patch is the 32nd's Red Arrow. Regulations govern which patches are authorized for soldiers, based on reporting relationships and command structure. As many of you know, the Red Arrow patch was born during WWI and represents the 32nd Division's combat record of piercing every enemy line it faced in action on the Western Front from France to Germany. Those of us serving in the Red Arrow Brigade in 2009 are standing

on the shoulders of giants: the Red Arrow troops who fought at places like Meuse-Argonne and Alsace in WWI...and from Buna to the home islands of Japan in WWII. It's an honor to wear the Red Arrow on our right sleeves.

International Zone

The 32nd Brigade's headquarters is in the IZ operating as Joint Area Support Group—Central (JASG-C...or, as we pronounce it, the “Jazz-G”). The JASG's mission is to secure and administer the IZ, an area a little over three miles wide (from east to west), and ranging from a few hundred yards to a couple miles (from north to south). The IZ is home to around 15,000 U.S. and coalition troops, along with employees of the U.S. Department of State, contractors, and the diplomatic missions of several other nations. Some of the other troops we see here include Australians, Fijians, Danes and Poles.

It's an interesting place to live and work. One of the JASG's responsibilities is to turn over many of the properties here in the IZ back to the government of Iraq. This isn't just a matter of handing over sets of keys. It's a complicated process involving property inventories and joint inspections, title searches, finding new locations for the operations that will be displaced, and ensuring that adequate security measures are in place during property transitions. Every piece of property returned to the Iraq government represents progress in the continued development of Iraq as a stable and self-sufficient sovereign nation. Soldiers of the 32nd Brigade are at the very center of this effort.

Most of the JASG's functions have now moved from FOB Union III to FOB Prosperity.

Victory Base Complex

VBC is a large complex of FOBs located near Baghdad International Airport — about 10 miles west of central Baghdad. VBC's FOBs are home to a dozen 32nd Brigade units and more than 1,400 Red Arrow soldiers.

FOB Future is home to a task force comprising the 1-128th Infantry's Headquarters Company and Company A. Company D and the 32nd MP Company are assigned to the 1-128th but work out of FOB Liberty. Unlike most of our units, which fell in on established missions and replaced units who were already up and running, these Wisconsin units have a “stand-up” mission: establishing an academy to train Iraqi correctional officers and onsite assistance visits to Iraqi corrections facilities throughout the country. FOB Future is an aptly named place, as an important piece of the future of Iraq will be formed there. A professionally trained corps of correctional officers will ensure the Iraqi corrections system meets minimum international standards. Our soldiers are working side by side with Iraqis to help build this better future together.

The Wisconsin troops at FOB Future are doing great work there, as anyone familiar with the reputation of Wisconsin National Guard soldiers would expect.

One example, among many, stands out. When the Wisconsin troops first arrived, many of the 100-plus vehicles they were assigned didn't work. But most do now. Before they even unpacked their duffel bags, our troops established a vehicle maintenance facility and swarmed over the broken-down equipment with wrenches, parts, and the “can-do” attitude Wisconsin Guard troops are known for throughout Iraq and everywhere else they serve. And this isn't easy work outside under the searing sun or in maintenance

shelters with no air conditioning in temperatures well over 100 degrees. The troops doing vehicle maintenance were pulled together from all the Wisconsin units at FOB Future — working together to get the job done. They're doing great work.

Over at Camp Cropper, about 900 Wisconsin troops are assigned: operating as the camp's mayor cell, responsible for base defense, or in the camp's theater internment facility (TIF).

Brig. Gen. Anderson and Command Sgt. Maj. Stopper had a chance to meet many of the Wisconsin troops at Cropper and to tour the TIF. I wish we could have taken some photos at the TIF so you could see how our troops are performing this important and challenging mission. Restrictions on photography don't allow it, though. But I can tell you our Wisconsin soldiers are treating detainees with dignity and respect. That's important for several reasons. First, it's the right thing to do. Second, this treatment reflects our values as an Army and as a nation. And finally, many of these detainees will someday be released back into Iraqi society and they'll remember the humane treatment they received from U.S. Army soldiers from the Wisconsin National Guard.

Camp Taji

Soldiers from three Wisconsin Guard companies were recently joined at Taji by soldiers from another company that had been located at Camp Bucca.

Taji is located a little bit north of Baghdad and is the site of another large theater internment facility and home now to about 500 Wisconsin soldiers. It's a bit desolate with several unsightly junkyards of old Iraqi military equipment, but most of the troop facilities are quite good. Taji has an especially large and well-stocked post exchange, good dining facilities and a variety of Morale, Welfare and Recreation activities — and a swimming pool was scheduled to open soon. Soldiers live in containerized housing units (CHUs), although some stay temporarily in "surge housing" until CHUs become available.

Camp Taji would never be mistaken for a Club Med. But for Iraq, it's not bad.

Camp Bucca, Joint Base Balad, Ashraf and other locations...

Just so you don't think we've forgotten about more than 600 soldiers at Camp Bucca and a few hundred more serving at Balad, Ashraf and other locations around Iraq...we haven't had a chance to visit them in person (yet), but we're staying in touch.

These soldiers, too, are doing great work and making significant and important contributions through their various missions.

That's our update for now.

We hope to get around to the other locations where 32nd Brigade troops are assigned and we'll include information and more photos from those places in future updates.

We're also keeping Wisconsin news media as well informed as we can about the 32nd Brigade's deployment, so watch for news stories and other information about all the great work your soldiers are doing in Iraq.

— Tim Donovan

Photos



This is what containerized housing units (CHUs) at Camp Taji look like from the outside. Most CHUs are trailer-sized units, each divided into three rooms. There are usually two soldiers assigned to each room.



State Command Sgt. Maj. George Stopper and Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson hold an informal "town hall" meeting at a dining facility at Camp Cropper June 17. The meeting gave at least some soldiers from each of Camp Cropper's eight units a chance to ask questions of the top Wisconsin Army Guard leadership.



Wisconsin soldiers are putting their mark all over Iraq. Here, a small utility vehicle operated by the 1158th Transportation Company at Camp Cropper sports not only a Motion W, but also the Red Arrow of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.



A concrete barrier "love note" from Camp Bucca, where nearly 700 soldiers from a half dozen Wisconsin National Guard units are serving. Camp Bucca is located in southern Iraq near the Kuwait border.



Soldiers of 2-127th Infantry stand tall at the unit's transfer of authority (TOA) ceremony at Camp Bucca May 22.

Photos



Sweltering weather doesn't keep Wisconsin soldiers from getting military vehicles in top shape at FOB Future June 17. The temperature hit 106 degrees and the air was filled with brown dust as soldiers worked to maintain equipment.



Col. Steve Bensend applies a Red Arrow combat patch on the right sleeve of Sgt. Norm Walrath at a patching ceremony in Baghdad for the JASG May 29. A unit patch worn on the right sleeve signifies that a soldier served with that unit in a combat zone.



Maj. Rene Emond and Command Sgt Maj. Bruce Hynes of the 132nd BSB cut the Army's 234th birthday cake June 14 at Camp Bucca.



Lt. Col. Lee Ward (left) and Col. Steve Bensend (right) tour FOB Future with Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson (center) and State Command Sgt. Maj. George Stopper.